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AFRICA'S PREPARATIONS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1-12 June 1992

INTRODUCTION

1. In preparation for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) to be held in Brazil in June 1992, ECA has been carrying out promotional activities to enhance the understanding of member States of the issues involved in the UNCED and how they should be placed in the African context. The OAU Pan-African Conference on Environment and Sustainable Development, which was held in Bamako, Mali from 23 to 30 January 1991, the meeting of 22 United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO) member States [Inter-State Committee for Combating Drought in the Sahel (CILSS), Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) and Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) countries] in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso from 13 to 15 February 1991 and the meeting of the Joint Intergovernmental Regional Committee on Human Settlements and Environment, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 4 to 8 March 1991, as well as meetings of the African Group at the third session of the UNCED Preparatory Committee, at Geneva, Switzerland from 12 August to 4 September 1991, provide the fora for ECA to carry out promotional activities.

2. From these meetings, which were held within the framework of the Kampala Agenda for Action Towards Sustainable Development in Africa, as well as the Bamako Commitment and the first African UNCED Preparatory Conference held in Cairo, Egypt from 11 to 16 July 1991, an African Common Position was adopted at the second Regional African Ministerial Preparatory Conference held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire on 13 and 14 November 1991, outlining the specifics of an African Environment and Development Agenda.

3. It was clear from the discussions during these meetings and conferences that the major issues of concern to Africa revolved around resources, consistent policy instruments and the capacity for Africa to achieve sustainable development goals through the sound management of the natural environment. Hence the issues of poverty which frustrates both Africa's development efforts and the utilization of resources as well as environmental conservation emerged as an important issue. Furthermore, it was also clear that the issues of debt and resources flows impinge on environmental protection and the conservation of natural resources.

I. AN AFRICAN ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

4. The African preparatory process was predicated on the important linkage between poverty, the management of natural resources and development in Africa. From this perspective, the relationship between the structure and functioning of African economies and the role of orthodox stabilization and structural adjustment programmes in promoting environmental degradation becomes a matter of strategic concern. These concerns have been brought into focus by African Governments at all fora where the environment or related matters have been discussed. Indeed this underscores the determining role of the environment on economic performance.

5. Over the last two decades, therefore, environmental awareness has greatly increased in Africa through the activities of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and other agencies of the United Nations system. Important among these activities were those aimed at establishing environmental machineries in member States. The result has been that there is either a government ministry responsible for the environment or a department of government dealing with such matters. The increased involvement of regional and subregional intergovernmental organizations such as the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), the Inter-State Committee for Combating Drought in the Sahel (CILSS), the Inter-governmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD), the Ministerial Conference on Desertification (COMIDES) and the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) in matters related to environment and development are all examples of this awareness. Other initiatives in this direction include those of the African NGOs Environment Network (ANEN), the African Women Assembly on Sustainable Development and the Agenda on the Environment for the Youth, all of which have received the support of UNEP.

6. Despite these noteworthy developments, it has been unfortunate to note that environmental degradation in Africa has continued to plague the continent in crisis proportions. This has been demonstrated in the difficult situation which led to the adoption by the OAU of Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (APPER) in 1986 which was later endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (UN-PAAERD). These are compelling illustrations of the fact that Africa needs to rethink with a view to redefine its development priorities and strategies that will take into consideration and stimulate environmental conservation nationally, regionally and in the context of the global environment movement. At the same time, African priorities must reflect African development interests and aspirations which must be respected by international community.

7. In the spirit of these concerns, a review of the environmental aspirations enshrined in the Monrovia Declaration (1979) on social and economic development of Africa, the Lagos Plan of Action (1980) as well as APPER (1986), UN-PAAERD (1986) and AMCEN (1985) which was a UNEP initiative and supported by ECA and the OAU was undertaken during the preparatory process. Out of the AMCEN meeting came the Cairo Programme which reflected the environmental aspirations enshrined in the Monrovia Declaration of 1979 and the Lagos Plan of Action and Final Act of Lagos.

8. These formed the basis for ECA's participation in the implementation of the recommendations of the World Commission on Environment and Development which gave birth to the Kampala Agenda of Action Towards Sustainable Development in Africa (1989) and the Bamako Commitment on Environment and Sustainable Development. Within this context, an African Environment and Development Agenda (AEDA) laying down the framework for environmental action, has emerged constituting an integral part of the African Common Position on Environment and Development.

9. The African Environment and Development Agenda emphasizes that environmental management is not, and should not, be addressed as a sectoral issue. Managing the environment is an integral part of the development process, which in itself demands a multifaceted approach. Environmental action, as part and parcel of the national, regional and global social and economic developmental process, while catering for global concerns, must be inward-looking in the first place. In other words, Africa's political and economic independence must be the major interest to be defended in all areas. These include, among others, the negotiations on the development and transfer of science and technology, as well as all forms of technical assistance and international economic relations.

10. Africa's approach to UNCED-1992 is, therefore, being focused on three broad issues:

(a) The imperative of popular participation and full democratization at all levels of governance and the decision-making process relating to environmental management and development;

(b) The economic empowerment of the region as a whole, of individual countries, especially women and grassroots groups; this is required for dealing effectively with mass and growing poverty, rising global inequalities and human resources development; and

(c) The necessity for the effective coordination of environment and development programmes and policies at the subregional and regional levels.

11. From these basic orientations, Africa's priority concerns relating to environment and development emerge in the areas identified below. These are the problems of:

(a) Poverty and population dynamics;

(b) Food security;

(c) Energy security;

(d) Sustainability of economic growth and employment;

(e) Security and stability of financial resources;

(f) Improvement of quality of life and habitat; and

(g) Weak analytical and managerial capacity in the area of environment and development.

12. The elements of priority concerns of the African Environment and Development Agenda are those dealing with the following:

(a) Food self-sufficiency and food security;

(b) Efficient and equitable use of water resources;

(c) Management of marine and coastal resources;

(d) Securing greater energy self-sufficiency;

(e) Managing demographic change and population pressures;

(f) Development of human settlement, planning and management;

(g) Optimizing industrial production and preventing pollution;

(h) Management of bio-diversity and bio-technology;

(i) Mitigating global warming and climate change;

(j) Protection and rehabilitation of tropical forests;

(k) Reversing desertification in Africa;

(l) Environmentally sound development of mineral resources;

(m) Popular participation and enhancement of the role of NGOs, youth and women;

(n) Development of environmental legislation;

(o) Capacity-building, environmental education, training and public awareness;

(p) Management of solid and hazardous wastes;

(q) Additional resources for environmental rehabilitation;

(r) Poverty eradication;

(s) Drought monitoring;

(t) Development of science and technology;

(u) Health implications of development;

(v) Prevention of natural disasters and reconstruction and rehabilitation of the effects of those that have already occurred;

(w) Promoting environment and development in land-locked countries; and

(x) Mitigating the impacts of refugees on environment and development.

13. These issues contained in the African Environment and Development Agenda imply that Africa's perspectives of the UNCED issues have to be underscored by the region's special environmental, social and economic problems as expressed in the African Common Position on Environment and Development. When these are added to the crucial problems of poverty at the national and regional levels which have been exacerbated by the deteriorating global economic inequalities, desertification, external debt, failed SAPs, very low human resource development and technology, it becomes clear that the questions of environmental protection in the North are not identical with environmental change in the South. In particular, there are issues of national and global environmental importance which indicate that the political environment in Africa has to change effectively in order to ensure durable solutions to environmental issues.

14. The African Environment and Development Agenda should, therefore, orient what actions governments and development agencies including those of the United Nations system must undertake in Africa in order to achieve environment and sound sustainable development. Member States must act as a team, each working out how best its capabilities can contribute to the package of national, subregional and regional development programmes with strong environment components, in their different initiatives. This is the difficult challenge facing the United Nations, Africa and its institutions.

15. Planning for environment and sustainable development in the 1990s and beyond will of necessity call for considerable resource requirements and strong institutional and technological support. Ideally, all support for additional resources and technology transfer and adaptation would enable Africa to play an effective role in global, regional and national programmes.

16. It will be recalled that Africa, in its AMCEN programmes, stressed action among African countries and this thrust for African inter-dependence on environmental management is still valid. Africa must, therefore, respond to environmental management responsibilities both within the national, regional, and the global context. In all this, ECA, UNEP, other organs of the United Nations system and all development agencies working in Africa must continue to fulfil their mandates on social and economic development, duly integrating environmental concerns. In this way, they will be assisting Africa in demonstrating its independence and its inter-dependence in developing the region.

17. It is on the basis of this approach that Africa can participate actively in the dialogue on global approaches, while making its priorities clear and practicable. Within the framework of the regional commitment to national and collective self-reliant development, the priorities and strategies adopted by member States should facilitate global environmental management and the internal flow of resources for this purpose, with a common position.

II. AN AFRICAN COMMON POSITION ON ITS ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

18. To put the African Environment and Development Agenda into political focus, African Governments represented by African ministers and designated senior officials responsible for environment and development as well as NGOs have been meeting to develop and consolidate the African Common Position on the African Environment and Development Agenda. The first Ministerial Regional Preparatory Conference for UNCED,

which was held in Cairo from 11 to 16 July 1991, did most of the work on the issues contained in the African Common Position on its Environment and Development Agenda. The second Ministerial Conference on the subject was held in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire from 11 to 14 November 1991 where the Common Position was adopted. The principal theme through both conferences was the recognition that humanity has a common heritage that is ecologically interdependent and that for a sustainable common future we must individually and collectively protect this common heritage.

19. The African Common Position responded to the spirit of African integration and inter-dependence as reflected in the Charter of the OAU, the existing treaties of African subregional economic groupings and in the recent Treaty establishing the African Economic Community which was signed in Abuja, Nigeria in June 1991. This political dimension will accelerate the dialogue on the links between environmental and trade policies. The dialogue should focus, inter alia, on the role of international trade in promoting sustainable development through the application of trade rules and instruments to environmental measures.

20. While aiming at achieving Africa's sustainable development goals through the environment, the African Environment and Development Agenda was concerned to enhance global action for environment and sustainability in social and economic development. The Agenda should strive to interact with the global environmental follow-up as of now into the UNCED-1992. The crisis that abounds in the region must serve as warning and cause for immediate remedial action, both at the regional level and the global follow-up to UNCED-1992. This will require serious and determined shifts in policy orientation and decision-making in environmental management as an integral part of development planning on the part of African countries on the one hand, and greater North-South and South-South cooperation on the other.

21. The importance of mobilizing all the global resources for environment and development programme activities has been greatly emphasized. It has also been emphasized that one of the surest way of doing this is to democratize decision-making in development activities. NGOs and the independent sector, including trade unions, business and similar groups must be encouraged to get involved in this process.

22. This will require that all United Nations agencies, particularly those operating in Africa and with a specific African mandate to coordinate their activities and work together to assist member States in dealing with these environmental problems in several ways. These should hinge on arrangements for coordination in which UNEP and all the other United Nations agencies working in Africa, will continue to associate ECA, intimately, in their assistance to member States as ECA is also the United Nations agency with overall mandate for ensuring sustainable social and economic development in Africa. To cope with these actions, the Commission is equipped with technical divisions that correspond to nearly all departments of government. It has also recently created a Multi-disciplinary Regional Advisory Group (MRAG) charged with the responsibility of providing required services of this nature to member States.

III. THE ROLES OF AFRICAN REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM IN THE UNCED PROCESS, AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AFRICAN ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT AGENDA AND UNCED AGENDA 21

23. It will be recalled that, in keeping with United Nations General Assembly resolution 44/228 which, inter alia, requested the regional commissions to organize regional preparatory conferences, ECA resolution 712 (XXVI) of May 1991 and OAU resolution CM/Res.1361 (LIV) of June 1991 requesting the Executive Secretary of ECA and the Secretary-General of the OAU to jointly prepare Africa for UNCED-1992, a number of significant steps have been taken in this direction.

24. Firstly, the OAU, in close collaboration with ECA, is running the African Year of the Environment. Activities are being carried out at the national level through national organizational committees. This is a

significant indication of the level of environmental awareness that is gathering momentum in the region. It is also an important prelude and contribution to the preparations for UNCED-1992.

25. Secondly, a number of activities to enhance the understanding of the issues and how they should be placed in the African context have been carried out. These have included the OAU Pan-African Conference on Environment and Sustainable Development which was held in Bamako, Mali from 23 to 30 January 1991, the meeting of 22 UNSO member States (CILSS, IGADD and SADCC countries) in Ouagadougou from 13 to 15 February 1991 and the meeting of the Joint Intergovernmental Regional Committee on Human Settlements and Environment in Addis Ababa from 4 to 8 March 1991.

26. Thirdly, the activities mentioned above contributed inputs to the African UNCED Preparatory Conference which was held in Cairo, Egypt from 11 to 16 July 1991. The outcome of this Conference was the Cairo Common Position on the African Environment and Development Agenda. This formed the basis for discussions and negotiations during the third session of the UNCED Preparatory Committee at Geneva from 12 August to 4 September 1991.

27. Fourthly, from the experience during that Preparatory Committee, African Governments decided to consolidate their Cairo Common Position as the African Common Position on their Environment and Development Agenda. This consolidated African Common Position was considered and adopted at the second African Regional Ministerial Conference held in Abidjan on 13 and 14 November 1991.

28. In adopting the consolidated Common Position on the African Environment and Development Agenda for UNCED and beyond, African Governments requested ECA to develop detailed programme activities which should form the framework of negotiations during the UNCED process for Agenda 21. They also called on ECA, OAU and the ADB, in collaboration with agencies of the United Nations system to support African countries in the negotiation process for all the relevant UNCED conventions and discussions during the fourth session of the UNCED Preparatory Committee to be held in New York in March 1992.

29. The UNCED process is a crucible to test the viability of existing institutions the execution of their mandates on development particularly through environmental management. It is imperative that national governments as well as all those institutions that have the mandate to assist governments in achieving sustained social and economic development. The three institutions, in this regard, complement themselves: ADB representing a strong force for the mobilization of resources for programme implementation; ECA catering for the technical programme conceptualization, monitoring of implementation of activities relating to environment and sustainable social and economic development; and the OAU ensuring a favourable regional political enabling environment for the implementation of the African Environment and Development Agenda within the framework of the African Common Position.

30. Under these circumstances, therefore, African financial institutions such as the ADB must take on the added responsibility of resource mobilization for African Governments on a non-investment basis. One sees the Bank playing the role of a focal point for the Global Environment Facility (GEF) which was set up by the rich countries and is being administered by the World Bank, UNDP and UNEP. The Bank might also consider sponsoring African Governments to the membership of GEF instead of allowing them to be sponsored bilaterally. The Bank itself might think of setting up and environment fund for African Governments to assist in the strengthening of environmental management mechanisms.

31. The United Nations system, on its side, needs to have a re-thinking on the matter. This is important not only because the United Nations system should be seen to be at the centre of action, but also because, inevitably, member States will continue to pressurize the system for technical assistance. ECA as the lead agency on social and economic development must strengthen its capacity to deliver not only to member States but also to carry out the needed inter-institutional activities and assistance in national, subregional and regional capacity-building in the area of environment and development.

32. The OAU is faced with the new challenge of the economic integration of the region through strong political action. This is embodied in the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community. The integration of environment into development planning must not be an ad hoc issue. Recent events have clearly shown the urgency for political action in environment and development. The promotion of the Bamako Convention on the Ban on the Import of Hazardous Wastes into Africa and the Control and Management of the Movement of such Wastes Generated in Africa provides the focus of action on pollution control in the region. It must also be the thrust of the African position on negotiations for activities in UNCED Agenda 21 relating to the management of wastes and hazardous materials. Until the OAU can throw its weight heavily in the UNCED negotiation process, the road ahead is difficult.

33. ECA, other sister agencies of the United Nations system and the ADB must give the OAU the support it needs in the formulation and implementation of the environmental components of the Treaty establishing the Community.

34. These are the challenges that African Governments must address. They must work out a clear definition of collective and individual roles and responsibilities for immediate and sustained action in this exercise. This includes active participation in all UNCED negotiations, UNCED Preparatory Committee meetings as well as the main Conference itself in Brazil, at the level of Heads of State and Government.

IV. CONCLUSION

35. The response to Africa's environment and development challenges for UNCED, the 1990s and beyond will therefore require concrete action programmes based on the strengthening of institutional and manpower capacity to meet those challenges. In other words, member States must take it upon themselves to develop programmes of action which will stimulate the appropriate response from national, regional and global institutions in terms of technical cooperation and the mobilization of resources.